George Jackson

(extracted from A "Revolutionary" And His Heroes)

Like so many *radicals*, George Jackson came from a good family. His parents were working class blacks, but his father, Lester, had a much harder childhood than he did. George was sent to a Catholic school but was soon running with street gangs. At the age of eighteen, he received a sentence of from one year to life for robbing a gas station. This sounds unduly harsh but it was par for the course in California at that time; Jackson could almost certainly have won parole if he had mended his ways, but instead he had constant run-ins with the prison authorities, and revelled in his image as a hard man. His violence was directed at other inmates irrespective of race.

Jackson's time in prison was not entirely wasted; as well practising thuggery and general troublemaking, he set about furthering his education. Part of that education was the usual *radical* politics; blaming the *racist* system rather than himself for his incarceration, he joined the Black Panthers. All may not have been lost, because the *racist* system permitted the *radical* Jackson to publish a critically acclaimed book of prison letters, *Soledad Brother*. All was lost though, because in addition to critical acclaim, Jackson won himself an indictment (along with two other inmates) for the murder of a prison guard. Shortly before standing trial for that alleged murder, and still only 29, he was shot dead in a bizarre escape attempt

from the infamous San Quentin Prison in August 1971. During this attempted break out, five people were murdered by other inmates: three prison guards and two inmates, all of them white.